

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /031 W
----- 034358

O R 261156Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9735

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

USUN NEW YORK 1561

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 7328

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS CASC ET

SUBJ: TENNECO FIVE

REF: (A) STATE 133217; (B) STATE 136125

1. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR REYNOLDS, UNDP REPRESENTATIVE
PHILLIPS AND I HAD LENGTHY DISCUSSION WITH FONMIN ZEWDE
EVENING JUNE 25 ON THIS SUBJECT, MUCH OF TIME BEING DEVOTED
TO BRIEFING HIM ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.

2. AMBASSADOR REYNOLDS BEGAN WITH OBSERVATIONS QUITE
SIMILAR TO PARA 3 OF REFTEL A. HE ADDED THAT TENNECO'S
GO-BETWEEN WAS WORRIED THAT ONGOING TROOP MOVEMENTS, LOCA-
TION OF WHICH WAS UNCLEAR TO REYNOLDS, MIGHT INTERFERE WITH
IMPENDING RELEASE OF WEDERFORT. ZEWDE SAID HE WOULD LOOK
INTO TROOP MOVEMENTS AND ENDEAVOR MAKE SURE NOTHING UN-
USUAL WOULD OCCUR WHICH MIGHT ALARM ELF.

3. I THEN MADE COMMENTS PER PARA 3 OF REFTEL A. WHILE
INDICATING THAT TENNECO IS PREPARED CONTINUE ITS NEGOTIATIONS
WITH IEF, I STRESSED THAT A NEW SITUATION WILL CONFRONT US
WHEN WEDERFORT IS RELEASED BECAUSE (A) PUBLICITY IN US
ATTENDING WEDERFORT'S RELEASE WILL STIMULATE STRONG CONGRES-
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SIONAL AND PUBLIC INTEREST IN IMMEDIATE RELEASE REMAINING

CAPTIVES, AND (B) ELF WILL FEEL NEXT MOVE IS UP TO IEG IN VIEW ITS EARLIER STATEMENTS THAT RELEASE OF FIVE IEG-HELD PRISONERS MUST FOLLOW RELEASE OF MRS. DORTZBACH AND WEDERFORT. LATER IN CONVERSATION I EXPRESSED PERSONAL SURPRISE THAT IEG HAD NOT THUS FAR EVEN FORMULATED A COUNTER-PROPOSAL TO ELF DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF FIVE PRISONERS.

4. PHILLIPS THEN EXPRESSED CONCERN THT FAILURE EFFECT RELEASE OF UNDP OFFICIAL IN TENNECO GROUP COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT CERTAIN UNDP PROGRAMS IN ETHIOPIA.

5. ZEWDE RESPONDED THAT HE FULLY AGREES RELEASE OF TENNECO 5 IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBILITY OF IEG. WITH HIS CHARACTERISTIC CANDOR, HE SAID THAT, WHILE HE HAD NOT YET DISCUSSED CURRENT STATUS OF CASE WITH HIS COLLEAGUES, HE THOUGH IT WOULD BE REASONABLE TO RELEASE SOME PRISONERS. ONLY HALF FACETIOUSLY HE COMMENTED THAT SECURITY SITUATION NOW SO BAD IN ERITREA, ALTHOUGH MANY IEG OFFICIALS REFUSE TO ADMIT IT, THAT ELF MIGHT FREE THESE FIVE PRISONERS BY ITS OWN ACTIONS IF IEG DOES NOT DO SO. (HE ALSO OBSERVED THAT HE HAS THOUGHT FOR YEARS THAT IEG SHOULD NEGOTIATE WITH ELF AND IS NOW ARGUING IN CABINET MEETINGS FOR THIS COURSE OF ACTION.) HOWEVER, HE WILL NEED TO CONSULT WITHIN IEG ON THIS PROBLEM AND THEN RESUME DISCUSSIONS WITH US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HE SPECULATED THAT IT MIGHT BE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FOR ARMY, VIEWS OF WHICH ARE SO IMPORTANT THESE DAYS, TO ACCEPT RELEASE FO PRISONERS WHO HAD BEEN FIGHTING AGAINST IT.

6. ZEWDE POINTED OUT THAT GOVGEN OF ERITREA HAD BEEN WILLING ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELF WEEKS AGO BUT THAT HE UNDERSTOOD TENNECO HAD PREFERRED TO CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS ITSELF. HENCE IEG COULD NOT BE BLAMED FOR LACK OF SUCCESS TO DATE. I ASSURED HIM THAT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF TENNECO'S PREFERENCE HAD BEEN CORRECT AND THAT USG UNDERSTOOD EARLIER NON-PARTICIPATION OF IEG IN NEGOTIATING EFFORT, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT SITUATION IS QUITE DIFFERENT NOW THAT TENNECO MUST RESPOND TO DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF IEG-HELD PRISONERS.

7. ZEWDE OBSERVED THAT GOVGEN WOULD PROBABLY PREFER NEGOTIATION THROUGH MORGHANI RATHER THAN THROUGH THE "ALTERNATIVE

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CHANNEL" (REGARDING IDENTITY OF WHICH HE DID NOT INQUIRE). REYNOLDS AND I SPOKE AT CONSIDERABLE LENGTH SO THAT HE WOULD SEE WHY WE ALL HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN ALTERNATIVE CHANNEL THAN IN MORGHANI. CONFLICTING ATTITUDES OF "REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL" AND "EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE" TOWARDS NURSE'S RELEASE WERE DISCUSSED IN DETAIL.

8. AT END MEETING I HAVE ZEWDE THE NEW INFORMATION REGARDING

TWO OF FIVE PRISONERS WHOSE RELEASE SOUGHT BY ZEIN (KHARTOUM 1506).

9. COMMENT. STATE 136125 JUST RECEIVED. REYNOLD'S COMMENTS AND MINE COVERED PROBLEM OF POSSIBLE TROOP MOVEMENTS WHICH COULD EITHER SLOW DOWN WEDERFORT'S RELEASE OR ENDANGER LIVES OF CAPTIVES. HOWEVER IT APPEARS DOUBTFUL THAT IEG WILL DO MUCH ABOUT FREEZING TROOP MOVEMENTS TEMPORARILY UNLESS IT KNOWS JUST WHAT AREA IS INVOLVED.
WYMAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: KIDNAPPING, HOSTAGES, PRISONERS RELEASE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: garlanwa
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ADDIS07328
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740168-0407
From: ADDIS ABABA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740614/aaaaalgg.tel
Line Count: 125
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: (A) STATE 133217; (B) STATE 136125
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2002 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <06-Aug-2002 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TENNECO FIVE
TAGS: PINS, CASC, ET, US, ELF, TENNECO FIVE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005